

We claim:

1.

1 An apparatus for dispensing packages of medication
2 having dispensatory instructions thereon, comprising:
3 a body having an internal cavity and an outlet;
4 an actuator received in said cavity;
5 a feed mechanism received in said cavity and in operable
6 communication with said actuator for feeding and dispensing the
7 packages of medication toward said outlet;
8 a processing unit in operable communication with said
9 actuator; and
10 a reading device received in said cavity and in
11 communication with said processing unit, said reading device relaying
12 the dispensatory instructions on the packages to said processing unit,
13 said processing unit communicating with said actuator and causing
14 said feed mechanism to dispense each of the packages toward said
15 outlet at a specified time.

2.

1 The apparatus of claim 1 wherein said feed mechanism
2 has a pair of feed rollers arranged to engage the packages as the
3 packages pass between said feed rollers and a pair of dispensing
4 rollers arranged to engage the packages as the packages pass
5 between said dispensing rollers.

3.

1 The apparatus of claim 2 wherein one of said feed rollers
2 has a driven member and said actuator has a drive member, said
3 driven member being arranged in operable communication with said
4 drive member causing said one feed roller to rotate in response to
5 rotational movement of said drive member.

4.

1 The apparatus of claim 2 wherein one of said dispensing
2 rollers has a driven member and said actuator has a drive member,
3 said driven member being arranged in operable communication with
4 said drive member causing said one dispensing roller to rotate in
5 response to rotational movement of said drive member.

5.

1 The apparatus of claim 2 further comprising an idler
2 member in operable communication with one of said feed rollers and
3 one of said dispensing rollers, said idler member causing said one feed
4 roller and said one dispensing roller to rotate in response to rotational
5 movement of said idler member.

6.

1 The apparatus of claim 5 wherein said one dispensing
2 roller is caused to rotate at a greater velocity than said one feed roller
3 in response to rotational movement of said idler member.

7.

1 The apparatus of claim 3 further comprising an idler
2 member communicating with said driven member and said drive
3 member causing said feed roller to rotate in response to rotation of said
4 actuator.

8.

1 The apparatus of claim 4 further comprising an idler
2 member communicating with said driven member and said drive
3 member causing said feed roller to rotate in response to rotation of said
4 actuator.

9.

1 The apparatus of claim 2 wherein said pair of feed rollers
2 are positioned in an angled orientation relative to said dispensing
3 rollers.

10.

1 The apparatus of claim 2 wherein one of said feed rollers
2 and one of said dispensing rollers are laterally spaced a first distance
3 from one another and the other of said feed rollers and the other of
4 said dispensing rollers are laterally spaced a second distance from one
5 another, said second distance being greater than said first distance.

11.

1 The apparatus of claim 1 further comprising a
2 communication board in communication with said processing unit, said
3 communication board being operable to send an electronic signal to
4 notify a user that it is time to take the medication contained in one of
5 the packages.

12.

1 The apparatus of claim 11 wherein said communication
2 board is operable to receive an electronic signal from a user providing
3 the user with the ability to obtain information from said processing unit
4 and the ability to send instructions to said processing unit.

13.

1 The apparatus of claim 1 wherein said reading device is a
2 bar code scanner.

14.

1 The apparatus of claim 1 wherein said reading device is
2 an optical character recognition device.

15.

1 The apparatus of claim 1 wherein said reading device is
2 operable to read programming instructions on the packages to program
3 said processing unit of the apparatus.

16.

1 The apparatus of claim 1 further comprising a chamber in
2 said cavity, said chamber capturing any packages of medication not
3 dispensed through said outlet within a specified time interval.

17.

1 The apparatus of claim 16 further comprising a lid
2 movable between an open position and closed position, said lid while in
3 the closed position dispensing the package of medication through said
4 outlet, said lid while in the open position delivering the package of
5 medication for capture within said chamber.

18.

1 The apparatus of claim 17 further comprising an actuator
2 communicating with said lid and said processing unit, said actuator
3 being operable to move said lid between its open and closed positions.

19.

1 The apparatus of claim 1 further comprising a power
2 module operably connected to the actuator and the processing unit,
3 said power module having at least one of a direct current power source
4 and an alternating current connector.

20.

1 The apparatus of claim 1 further comprising an interface
2 screen, said interface screen displaying the current time and the time
3 the next dosage of medication is to be taken.

21.

1 The apparatus of claim 20 further comprising a plurality of
2 interface keys, each of said interface keys capable of changing
3 definition providing each interface key with the ability to program
4 multiple features within said processing unit.

22.

1 A method of dispensing packages of medication at
2 prescribed intervals of time, comprising the steps of:
3 providing packages containing predetermined doses
4 medication;
5 providing a medication dispensing machine;
6 loading said packages into said medication dispensing
7 machine;
8 making a package accessible over a predetermined
9 interval of time; and
10 making said package inaccessible after said
11 predetermined interval of time lapses if said package is not removed
12 from said medication dispensing machine during said predetermined
13 interval of time.

23.

1 The method of claim 22 including making another one of
2 said packages accessible during another predetermined interval of time
3 other than said package made inaccessible.

24.

1 The method of claim 22 including programming said
2 medication dispensing machine to notify a user when said
3 predetermined interval of time has arrived.

25.

1 The method of claim 24 including programming said
2 medication dispensing machine to notify a caregiver if said package is
3 not removed from said medication dispensing machine during said
4 predetermined interval of time.

26.

1 The method of claim 22 including accessing information
2 in said medication dispensing machine from a location remote from
3 said medication dispensing machine to obtain a history of medication
4 compliance of a patient.

27.

1 The method of claim 26 including providing said
2 medication dispensing machine with a processing unit for managing
3 said information.

28.

1 The method of claim 22 including providing said
2 packages as a string of packages attached to one another.

29.

1 The method of claim 28 including separating said
2 package from said string of packages during said predetermined
3 interval of time to make said package accessible.

30.

1 The method of claim 29 including providing said
2 medication dispensing machine with a feed mechanism, said feed
3 mechanism being operable to separate said package from said string
4 of packages.

31.

1 The method of claim 28 including tearing said package
2 from said string of packages during said predetermined interval of time.

32.

1 The method of claim 28 including perforating a seam
2 between adjacent ones of said packages prior to said loading step.

33.

1 The method of claim 28 including separating said
2 package from said string of packages after said predetermined interval
3 of time to make said package inaccessible.

34.

1 The method of claim 22 including providing said
2 packages as separate and individual packages.

35.

1 The method of claim 22 including providing said
2 packages with readable information, said medication dispensing
3 machine reading the information on said packages to facilitate
4 operation of the medication dispensing machine.

36.

1 The method of claim 22 including biasing said package
2 into engagement with a feed mechanism to facilitate making said
3 package accessible during said predetermined time interval and
4 inaccessible after said predetermined time interval.

37.

1 The method of claim 35 including presenting said
2 readable information as a bar code.

38.

1 The method of claim 37 including providing said
2 medication dispensing machine with a bar code scanner to read said
3 bar code.

39.

1 The method of claim 35 including presenting said
2 readable information as optically readable characters.

40.

1 The method of claim 39 including providing said
2 medication dispensing machine with an optical character recognition
3 device to read said optically readable characters.

41.

1 The method of claim 22 including providing a display
2 screen on said medication dispensing machine and displaying the
3 current time and the time the next package of medication is to be taken
4 on said display screen.

42.

1 The method of claim 41 including providing a plurality of
2 interface keys adjacent said display screen and defining each of said
3 interface keys to control separate functions of said medication
4 dispensing machine.

43.

1 A method of constructing an apparatus for dispensing
2 packages of medication, said packages having an outer surface with
3 dispensation instructions on said outer surface, comprising:
4 providing a body having an internal cavity and an outlet;
5 inserting a feed mechanism into said internal cavity;
6 inserting a processing unit into said internal cavity and in
7 operable communication with said feed mechanism; and
8 inserting a reading device in said cavity and in
9 communication with said processing unit enabling said reading device
10 to communicate said dispensation instructions on said packages to
11 said processing unit, said processing unit operably energizing said feed
12 mechanism to dispense a predetermined one of said packages toward
13 said outlet during a specified time interval.

44.

1 The method of claim 43 including providing said feed
2 mechanism with a pair of feed rollers and a pair of dispensing rollers,
3 laterally spacing said feed rollers from one another to engage said
4 packages as said packages pass between said feed rollers and
5 laterally spacing said dispensing rollers from one another to engage
6 said packages as said packages pass between said dispensing rollers.

45.

1 The method of claim 44 including inserting an idler
2 member in operable communication with one of said feed rollers and
3 one of said dispensing rollers, said idler member causing said one feed
4 roller and said one dispensing roller to rotate in response to rotational
5 movement of said idler member.

46.

1 The method of claim 45 including arranging said idler
2 member to cause said dispensing rollers to rotate at a greater velocity
3 than said feed rollers.

47.

1 The method of claim 43 including inserting a
2 communication board in said internal cavity and in communication with
3 said processing unit and configuring said communication board to send
4 an electronic signal to notify a user that a predetermined time interval

5 in which to take the medication contained in one of said packages has
6 arrived.

48.

1 The method of claim 44 including laterally spacing said
2 feed rollers from said dispensing rollers a distance greater than a
3 length of any one of said packages of medication.

49.

1 A feed mechanism for separating a package of
2 medication from a string of packaged medications, said string of
3 packaged medications having adjacent packages attached to one
4 another along a perforated seam, said feed mechanism comprising:
5 an actuator having a drive member;
6 a pair of feed rollers arranged generally parallel to one
7 another, one of said feed rollers having a driven member in operable
8 communication with said drive member causing said one feed roller to
9 rotate in response to rotational movement of said drive member and
10 causing said packages to advance between said feed rollers; and
11 a pair of dispensing rollers arranged generally parallel to
12 one another and laterally spaced from said feed rollers, one of said
13 dispensing rollers having a driven member in operable communication
14 with said drive member causing said one dispensing roller to rotate in
15 response to rotational movement of said drive member and causing
16 said packages to advance between said dispensing rollers.

50.

1 The feed mechanism of claim 49 further comprising an
2 idler member in operable communication with said driven member of
3 said feed rollers and said driven member of said dispensing rollers,
4 said idler member causing said one feed roller and said one dispensing
5 roller to rotate in response to movement of said drive member.

51.

1 The feed mechanism of claim 49 wherein said one
2 dispensing roller rotates at a greater velocity than said one feed roller
3 in response to rotational movement of said drive member.

52.

1 The feed mechanism of claim 49 wherein one of said
2 feed rollers and one of said dispensing rollers are laterally spaced a
3 first distance from one another and the other of said feed rollers and
4 the other of said dispensing rollers are laterally spaced a second
5 distance from one another, said second distance being greater than
6 said first distance.

53.

1 The feed mechanism of claim 49 including a biasing force
2 acting on at least one of said feed rollers to bias said feed rollers
3 toward one another, said feed rollers continually engaging said
4 packages as said packages pass between said feed rollers, said

- 5 biasing force allowing said feed rollers to move away from one another
- 6 as said packages pass between said feed rollers.

54.

1 The feed mechanism of claim 49 including a biasing force
2 acting on at least one of said dispensing rollers to bias said dispensing
3 rollers toward one another, said dispensing rollers continually engaging
4 said packages as said packages pass between said dispensing rollers,
5 said biasing force allowing said dispensing rollers to move away from
6 one another as said packages pass between said dispensing rollers.

55.

1 The feed mechanism of claim 49 wherein said feed rollers
2 are laterally spaced from said dispensing rollers a distance greater
3 than a length of any one of said packages.